I Have This Friend by brodie-wan

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Summary: El breaks into Hopper's Bronco three days after Starcourt just to be near him. Max joins her. Friendship one shot. I hope you enjoy.

I Have This Friend

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El sat in the driver's seat of Hopper's police Bronco, an unlit cigarette hanging from her mouth. His Chief's badge hung heavily from the flannel shirt she was wearing. His hat sat on the seat next to her. A low growling sound emitted from between her tightly pressed lips as her hands gripped the steering wheel and turned it back and forth pretending to drive. She scrunched down in the seat to press the gas pedal to the floor and intensified her growling.

She could just image what her dad had said to Mike when he jerked him up and marched him out of the cabin to this very vehicle.

She remembered the ride home from Hawkins lab after she had closed the gate. She was wrapped in his coat, comforted by his smell, but exhausted. She looked to passenger seat and could just see herself there, leaning against the door. He had talked to her the whole time. Sweet words. Kind words. The loving words of a dad, who was not yet her dad.

She remembered him revving the engine and driving so fast on the back roads. She smiled at the joy she saw in him and the sense of freedom they both had.

"*You're speeding, Dad!" she had blurted in excitement and pinch of fear.*

He had turned to her, grinning like a mad man, and said: "I guess you better call the Police."

They had both burst into fits of laughter as they shot down a country road.

A fierce knocking on the passenger door startled El from her memories. The door opened to reveal Ma Mayfield. Her red hair was glistening with new rain, which El had not noticed starting while she was lost in thought.

"You're late," El said, matter of fact as she watched her friend

carefully move the hat to the center console.

Max scrunched up her face in faux annoyance. "And you're sitting a Police Bronco in the rain in the middle of the night."

"Smoking too," El said, removing the stick from her mouth and holding it between her fingers.

"I see that," Max, shaking her head slightly. "Got one for me?"

"Sure," El said, taking one of Hopper's packs, still in the glove box, and shaking one loose. She had learned that trick from watching her dad intently when he smoked. He told her never to do it. That it was not healthy. But he kept on. "Not smoking for real, though."

"Got it," Max said, placing the cigarette between her lips.

Still holding the pack, El placed to her nose to open spot and inhaled. She wrinkled her nose, yet basked in the smell of her dad's special brand.

"You okay, El?" Max asked, knowing full well she wasn't.

Shrugging, El felt small and, suddenly unworthy of his seat. She looked at Max.

"You drive," she declared in a way that would not invite discussion.

Max's mouth fell open. "Drive? Where do you want to go this late at night? You realize this car is not at the cabin or at the Byers' house. It's parked in the back lot of the Police Station."

"Obviously," El said, sitting up straighter.

"So, we would be stealing the Bronco if we drove anywhere," Max said, incredulously.

"That too," El replied.

Max stared out the windshield through the rain drops which coalesced and streaked toward the dormant wipers. She made a decision.

"Okay," she agreed. "I'll drive. Where is it you want to go?"

"The quarry."

"What?" Max exclaimed, furrowing her brow. "I'm not going to the quarry at midnight on a rainy summer night! That's just nuts."

"Nuts like fighting a giant, super gross, Mind Flaying Monster?" El replied, raising her eyebrows in question.

"Some things come to us and we face them," Max answered. "Going to quarry is just dangerous."

El's face hardened. "You are right. You can go. I will drive."

"You don't know how to drive, El," Max replied, knowing it would solve nothing.

"Just go, Max," El said. "I can be sad by myself. I'm sorry I called you."

"No, El. I'm not leaving you. We can be sad together, but we don't have to do it at the quarry.

Max noticed the badge on El's shirt. She looked at the hat forlornly. The keys were in the ignition.

El was silent, her eyes locked on the pink, elastic bracelet on her right wrist.

"You know I have the friend. You don't know her, but she's pretty cool. For someone who's been through a lot, she's the nicest person ever. She wasn't nice at first. Not sure what that was all about, but once I got to know her, she's great. She's smart and strong and pretty and kind and funny and…sad, too. She's sad, too. She lost her mom when she was just a baby. Her dad was not a nice man. Kinda like my stepdad."

"Who is this friend?" El asked. "Seems like I should know her. If she's that cool. We could use another girl in The Party. Not Erica. It is not Erica, right?"

Max laughed out loud. "No, it's not Erica. She doesn't fit the bill I described."

"Then who is this mystery Friend?" El pressed. "Mess up!"

Max chuckled. "I think you mean 'Fess up'," Max replied. "Well, let me see. She has lovely curly brown hair and her eyes are so brown and expressive."

"Ex-pressive?"

"Like full of emotion. People can tell how you're feeling from your eyes."

"My eyes?" El asked, unsure.

Max barreled on with her description. "You should see how strong she is. I've never seen a girl lift as much as she can. And her endurance. My god, she takes a licking and keeps on ticking. Like a Timex, I tell you."

"If she is so special, she should be your best friend," El said, hurt and frustration rising in her throat.

"She *is* my best friend, El," Max confessed. "She's you!"

"Wait…me?" El said in surprise. He eyes went up as she retraced all the things Max had said. "Why are you telling me this?"

"To distract you, of course. Though every word is true," Max said, smiling. "That quarry thing isn't happening. But…if you are wanting to break the law, I have another more immediate solution."

El perked up. "Yes? What is it?"

"We break into the police station," the readhead said, pleased with herself. "What would The Chief think of that?"

El rolled her eyes. "Did that already. Got the badge and the hat and the keys."

The rain started to come down harder, hammering the roof of the

Bronco.

"Well," Max said, a croak of emotion creeping into her voice. "We could just stay right here. We could sit right here and miss The Chief together. We don't have to go anywhere."

At those words, El clutched the badge on her shirt and started to cry. She leaned over and rested her head on Max's lap. Reaching back, she grabbed the hat and clutched it to her chest as she wept.

Max laid a tentative hand on the curly brown locks and pulled them away from El's face. "Nope. We'll just stay right here."